

Public Comment on SJ 18-Interim Study of Barriers to Occupational/Professional Licensing for People with a Criminal Conviction

Good afternoon Madam Chair and members of the committee. My name is Bart Holt. I had the opportunity to speak to you previously concerning SJ 18, the interim study of barriers to occupational/professional licensing for people with a criminal conviction. Thank you for giving this interim study your attention.

I would like to tell you more about my own personal experience in attempting to get my license back to practice podiatry in the State of Montana after a criminal conviction. Upon my arrest, I voluntarily went into and completed treatment that was recommended by the State Medical Board. While in prison, I volunteered to undergo further treatment, and took other classes that would address underlying issues that contributed to my offense conduct. Treatment and aftercare were required while on probation, which I have also completed. Furthermore, I have had clear conduct for the past five years since my release from prison. However, I still have more time to complete probation.

It is my opinion that completion of probation is not necessarily adequate in terms of rehabilitation of someone. I think the question is whether the person has addressed the issues that are related to the criminal behavior. This would be confirmed by evidence of clear conduct. Studies have shown that if there is clear conduct for three years after release from prison, it is unlikely that an individual will reoffend.

I also think there should be a straightforward pathway for people with criminal histories to apply for licensure. In my own case, I was reluctant to apply for relicensure because I was unsure how to proceed.

Furthermore, having a clear pathway to licensure for people with a criminal history is one side of the coin. It should be made clear to the individual that they have to do their part in addressing underlying issues that lead to the offense, and apply what they have learned by demonstrating clear conduct.

From my own experience in prison, and after release, I have met people that turned their lives around and are no longer the people who committed their crimes. It is my opinion that they should be given the chance to move forward and be productive citizens. Removing barriers to occupational/professional licensing will go a long way in accomplishing this.

Thank you for letting me speak to you today.